

AGRICULTURE: THE FOUNDATION OF ALL ECONOMY

Concerning Concrete Experiments*

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All members of the Anthroposophical Society are concerned about economic processes being initiated and structured out of what we call the life of the spirit. Humanity as a whole — not only single individuals — should strive unitedly from spiritual impulses to change nature. Although it is extraordinarily difficult to imagine a society wherein this has become a habitual attitude, it is nevertheless true that people do appear before this members' meeting to present their respective insights and deeds, and the rest of us try to follow it up. Thus an Anthroposophical Society can be created in which the interaction of spiritual life and economic life becomes possible. The attitude of our Society can become the foundation for a modern agriculture.

It is true that when we speak of agricultural activity we are referring to the work accomplished by individuals, but the impact upon nature as a whole must be seen as a function of society. The individual farmer deals with soil, plants and animals simultaneously. Equally affected by his work, however, is the fourth realm of nature: the physical part of man, in fact, the physical part of humanity as a whole. This latter effect is both a process of individualization and of community building. In work, man becomes an individual; he separates himself from the group-soul sphere of involvement. He changes the work gesture of humanity into the specific work gestures of individual people. At the same time, however, he develops the ability to unite the separated work gestures in a new way, through cooperation. Man, by working on the three kingdoms of nature, achieves the progress both of the individual and of humanity as a whole (the fourth realm) and does this also in a threefold way. Agricultural activity thereby becomes the primal foundation of all other activities, because it represents the attempt to accomplish, in a way, the described goals in one stroke.

Looking back at history, we find a time when all of mankind worked with a group-soul consciousness upon the totality of nature. In the totalities of both man and nature the impulse

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towards individualization, towards separation, acts as divine or natural law, respectively. For mankind this means disintegration, for the individual loneliness; for the world it means division, and for the parts unrelatedness and simplicity. The whole, in terms of quality of life, can no longer be comprehended, it becomes a non-concept. It is merely defined as the sum of its parts; and since the whole as such becomes evident as the sum total, reference to a specific concept seems unnecessary. As a result, the measure for man and the understanding of humanity as a whole also fade away, and with it the understanding for entities which before were considered to be endowed with a soul or group soul.

Thus agriculture also alters its face. It lacks cohesion; the individual striving to gain an immediate personal profit from any area of nature predominates. Increasingly, farmers work with only one crop, or with a specific quality of soil, or with a specific type of animal, without considering how their specialties relate to all other aspects of the farm organism. Thus begins an agriculture of monocultures, an agriculture which "functions". Man, as a highly intelligent being, is able to use all the forces of nature to his advantage, one at a time. But it becomes apparent that, since man's consciousness of the whole has disintegrated, the created world quite naturally disintegrates also. The measure is missing. We have arrived at a point where our actions, as well as our thinking, roll along in an endless, uncontrolled repetition, in a kind of atomistic sequence.

For agriculture, this means a limitless production of chickens, wheat, milk, etc., because the measure as an experienced, meaningful concept is lacking. Instead, the abstract law of mass production is formed — nostalgically or rhetorically we call it growth — because our ability to comprehend the form as a whole has been lost. For this reason the situation is fatal as long as we remain trapped in a dead-end street, where we may drown or be buried by the senseless "growth."

The new concepts that can lead us out of this dead-end of proliferation and excessiveness were called by Rudolf Steiner the "farm organism" and, finally, the "Agricultural Individuality." He described how such agricultural individualities can be created consciously through imagination, inspiration and intuition, and through associative cooperation. Anthroposophy and the General Anthroposophical Society with its branches (the School of Spiritual Science, and associated daughter movements) also make it possible for the divine impulse towards individualization to enable

us to comprehend the Christ impulse directly, in a new way, as a means of healing our thinking, feeling and willing in relation to the whole.

Beginning with *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*, Rudolf Steiner describes how knowledge, justice and labor can attain an ethical, or healing, character through love. Healing means both to combine parts into a unity, and to divide them in such a manner that they can regain meaning just by being able to form a new whole.

Agriculture, as envisioned by Rudolf Steiner in his *Agriculture Course*, fulfills these criteria and therefore can be seen as constituting the foundation for all economic activities. It is the source from which the values of industry and the service organizations obtain their justification, since they must produce what the "Agricultural Individuality" lacks.

The life of the agricultural unity depends on individuals who work within it more and more independently, but who produce parts (fruits and food items) by creating the countryside as an organic whole, a self-sustaining organism, a true "Individuality." Human beings individualize within such an environment — i.e. they loosen themselves from out of the group soul, as separate entities, by laboring independently on concrete, self-determined tasks. Yet their separate activities will combine to create a sensible whole, because all such activity is directed towards the agricultural individuality within which, and through which, these co-workers make their living.

Anthroposophical *community building*, by creating a new form of group soul in the spirit world, founded on the individual striving for knowledge, corresponds to anthroposophical individualization, which is based on individual efforts of will aimed, through labor divided in brotherhood, at the creation of a common physical body for this new group soul. Hence everyone can find a meaningful whole by working in that area where his special capacities have placed him. Such divided labor results simultaneously in the discovery of the individual in the whole and the whole in the individual. "Discovering" means removing the veil from nature; it means the recognition of the spirit which weaves within the agricultural individuality just as it works in individuals and in humanity. People devoted to anthroposophy desire to create life realms which enable a future to unfold. The future itself can only be recognized if at the same time it is created. All this touches upon the secret of the transformation of the world through humanity.

I would like to name a few places on behalf of which the *Gemeinnützige Treuhandstelle* (GTS), or Communal Trust Cooperative, has worked in this area in a special way as the mediator of initiatives by anthroposophists. The first and fundamental experiment where the GTS tested this kind of cooperation took place at the Dottenfelder Hof (a farm) near Bad Vilbel, in Hesse. Dr. Manfred Klett has reported on this operation. Then similar farm operations have been founded in the Lüneburger Heide (Bauckhof, Sottorf, Klein-Süstedt and Stütensen), in Schleswig-Holstein (Hasenmoor, Fuhlenhagen, Springe), in Baden-Württemberg (Landbauschule Goldenhof, Willmann Gardens, Lehenhof, Brachenreuthe, Hermannsberg), in Bavaria (Wald-am-Inn and Wernstein). Everyone should realize that all the attempts here described are still in the experimental stage, based on physical labor, will-power and perception. This means that the people involved are occupied least of all with what is penetrated by clear consciousness. However, whoever cares to look will find in each of these places some of the ideals concerning agriculture described above.

Agriculture is the foundation of all economic activities, materially, social-judicially, and conceptually. Farmers are beginning to realize that every valid economic concept has to be re-invented by the people who produce and consume, as an archetype both of individualizing the world and of creating it anew as a totality. The division of this task among all men emanates from the nature of the labor itself and, since it is barely comprehensible, it is often labeled unrealistic by many people. Only if all individuals, despite their differences, carry on the individualizing of the world, will the world become thoroughly pluralized and yet whole.

Agricultural individualities can be enriched more and more by service and industrial labor, which, because they are based on divided labor, also become community activities. And yet these activities remain a supplement to agriculture. The degree of their involvement determines the agricultural individuality. By necessity, industry and service organizations alone would become both uneconomical and superfluous if the concept of economy were not derived from agriculture, from the treatment of soil and land. This work becomes the measure for all other work, because it reveals the missing elements, the mistakes. Industry and service supply what is lacking; that is their measure. An offense against this truth is not only a grave fallacy, it contradicts all economy, all ethics and all common sense. The extraordinary importance of agriculture lies in the fact that its activity represents the founda-

tion of human existence in total. Order in our actions (meaning order in the economic life) has to begin with the attempt of each human being, with the aid of his fellow men, to establish a concrete relation to a concrete piece of earth and then to accept responsibility for this piece of earth in the same way that he accepts responsibility for his own body. Initiating this process is the basic exercise in economical activities for all anthroposophists. This is just as important today as the fight against slavery was in years past. In all the farm operations mentioned above, legal, economic, and spiritual conditions were created through new legal bodies (agricultural research societies, working communities, public associations, etc.) which made it possible for more and more people to relate directly to these places.

All the places described above have one thing in common; each has adopted some activity other than agriculture itself. This has come about not only because of the aforementioned reasons, but also because one cannot make money from agriculture. That is not its true purpose! Agriculture creates living space for people who produce commodities and use the money to distribute these commodities. As long as this fundamental definition of agriculture is not recognized, work with nature as a totality (as in landscape-farming, or in environmental projects, which occupations would make environmental protection superfluous) cannot be understood or practiced. Nor can the economy itself, in its larger context, be understood as the effort to create the concept of a new world through an active participation which involve the spiritual life of all individual human beings and mankind as a whole. Economic common sense cannot be practiced unless the common sense is derived from reality; if nostalgia, romance, sectarian behavior and the sermons of health fanatics are not overcome, it will be impossible to reverse the trend of the decaying agriculture and the destruction of nature and to initiate a healing process instead. Our evaluation of reality proves those people wrong who in their gossip claim that anthroposophists live in a "safe world" and do not wish to see reality. Probably nobody feels the sufferings of the world more painfully than anthroposophists. What gives them confidence, however, is the fact that they embrace concepts which can make possible the healing of the world and can see a way out of the dead-end. The greatest need is to comprehend agriculture as the creation of landscapes and to accomplish this with the certainty that the resulting fruits will be the free gift of nature.

Whatever agriculture cannot provide for mankind's prosperity,

industry, service or trade will contribute. For the purpose of producing and acquiring commodities above the necessary minimum for existence, agriculture differentiates itself into industry, service-performance, and trade. In Sottorf, for instance, a guest home is added to the agricultural activities. In Stütensen, agriculture is supplemented by services for handicapped people, and by the cooperation with Bauck KG (food trade and processing). In Klein-Süstedt, a food distribution service is added to agricultural work. In Fuhlenhagen, bread is baked commercially, and people in need of special care are cared for. In Hasenmoor, work is done with socially deprived persons, and in Springe, with conscientious objectors. At the Dottenfelder Hof, a training center for agriculture has been established. At the Lehenhof, the activities include a large bakery, a factory for woolen wear, a crate factory, and a garden which furnishes, in itself, a transition from farming to the production of commodities. In Wald-am-Inn, scientific plant breeding is practiced. In Wernstein, a student dormitory is in the making; in addition, the milk is processed into cheese.

All these establishments attempt to embrace the totality of agriculture, occupations, services, and food trade through their economic activities. This is extraordinarily difficult, however. Only those who are directly involved in the process of building up these new communities which combine labor, economy, and communal living can understand what people have to achieve and suffer in order to grow into the consciousness of such modern social unities. The old blood-bound family consciousness must be replaced by a new consciousness based on spiritually-oriented daily cooperation. It is of course essential that people who are destined for such communities be able to join them. The members must either change the property rights concerning land, or the inheritance rights, or both. Whatever is in any way still connected with "blood and soil" must be disregarded and removed from the social reality. This means that living habits will have to be changed so radically that the average city dweller may have difficulty understanding them. Traditional laws are still effective in the country, even though they have been modified here and there. In addition, the people who are now laboring as equals in such places must conquer for themselves the consciousness of what they are doing. They must study spiritual science in general, and in particular develop in their thinking an image of what the "agricultural individuality", in which they live, may become. Those who have worked for years on these issues recognize the future possibilities whenever the term "agricultural individuality" is mentioned; but

the awareness of this "individuality" should in addition become a knowledge shared by all. It is of little importance if one person knows a great deal, because what counts is that this knowledge lights up in the ten, twenty, or thirty co-workers within the living community. It is also important for the content to become understandable, so that the resulting discussions can enable more and more participants to arrive at the spiritual basis of their imagination and inspiration in order to derive, out of this foundation, their intuitions for making daily decisions in their work.

Even more must be said in this respect: all these people must become book-keeping farmers! They must daily and annually justify to themselves to what extent they have realized what lived in them as the idea of the agricultural organism on the way toward the agricultural individuality. They have to express these results in concepts and numbers. They have to invent a new book-keeping system in which not the personal gain and usage, or the individual loss, appear as the outcome, but in which questions are answered like the following: Did the farm as organism become more real during the past year? Did purchases from the outside decrease? How many more people were given shelter and how many were nourished? One must work hard to formulate the right questions, and beyond that translate the questions into numbers and names to fit the accounting columns, and finally arrive at the answers. All this is an additional task, rarely mastered. But until this happens, the new agriculture is far from being active in the light of full consciousness. All the places mentioned earlier carry out experiments conceived with these things in mind. Everyone is invited to imagine what immense efforts are undertaken by the few people who are working with this type of agriculture in Germany. It is the implementation of anthroposophy by human beings who, proceeding from the will-sphere, endeavor to penetrate the will-sphere of their daily activity with consciousness.

This type of agriculture, which in itself is not a profitable business, bears in itself a further difficulty. Training, division of labor, co-operation, all have to be based on entirely new concepts. The general, public notion is to have one hundred hectares (or whatever acreage) worked by a family, by one farmer. It is obvious that this notion is in fundamental contrast to division of labor. However, the above-described agriculture can only be conceived of as divided in labor. Consequently, the modern farmer represents a contradiction to the generally held notion of farming and many times he also lives in contradiction to what he himself and his

friends and what everyone experiences as being right, sensible and ethical.

Let us be realistic; how is a farmer supposed to concentrate on new concepts while caring for a cow, under the pressure of daily work, and in view of the established experience related to division of labor which has formed his life and spirit over a thousand years? Of course, the cow has to be milked by the same person day in and day out. It is impossible to change people constantly. How then can anthroposophy be nurtured as cognition when the farmer is entirely involved in agricultural activity which, dealing with the living, cannot be interrupted arbitrarily? Where does one find time and strength for spiritual activity when working a sixteen-hour day! Where do the people come from who have enough imagination and the necessary strength to introduce on the farm the eight-hour day or even the six- or five-hour day? Modern agriculture will not be able to escape these questions. The prosperity existing in the cities — including vacations to advance education and generous offers for recreation — must, through proper measures, be brought to the farms. The responsibility for this does not lie with the farmers; it is our responsibility, the responsibility of anthroposophists and of everyone who feels the heartfelt desire to create a humane world.

In summary, let me repeat that agriculture is the foundation of all economic activities, defined as the spiritual initiative of society. Future events will be influenced according to whether or not we will be in a position to construct social conditions which make agricultural activity the basis of our daily mutual work in the spheres of economy, make agriculture in fact our concept of economy altogether. Such a concept will attain life only when agriculture becomes increasingly integrated with the concrete work of every human being. Only then will the people who do creative, full-time agricultural work find moments for spiritual activity — and time to establish their social forms on the basis of knowledge of a spirit world of which they and their co-workers are a part. The task of creating life spheres in which this is possible, in which people become free, is not the primary task of these agricultural workers; it is the task of their contemporaries, of society as a whole. It is above all the task of anthroposophists, whose all-pervading goal in life is the freeing of man. This means that we anthroposophists will buy farms on the real estate market until every one of us has enough land to establish his justification and responsibility, not more and not less. We will transfer enough

money to these farms, as support for the living requirements of the farmers, so that young people can and will want to live there, farmers will find time for spiritual activity and training and an eight-hour working day (of which at least two hours should be set aside for matters of spiritual science) can be introduced.

No matter whether we ourselves are physicians, plumbers, merchants, white or blue-collar workers, educators, therapists, or whatever, agriculture concerns us all. Through it, we create the physical body of the social organism, of mankind itself.